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(54) **Electronic postage meter having a one time actuable operating program to enable setting of critical accounting registers to predetermined values.**

(57) In order to allow manufacturing complete freedom in testing and to ensure that a customer receives an electronic postage meter or electronic parcel register preset to known values, the meter is operable to preset internal registers in the accounting module (2) when a serial number is locked in the unit. The dollar values in ascending and descending registers, and the unit piece count may be preset to any predetermined value only once during the life of the non-volatile memory device (36) associated with the accounting module. The serial number lock is modified to enable internal register modification to be provided. To minimize any unauthorized abuse, by an external stimulus or by an internal failure, the serial number lock is tested before each register value is preset. The serial number lock is set after the preset to bar unauthorized entry into this sensitive routine. If a set lock is detected during any of the tests, a non-recoverable fatal error is set in the meter/register. Operation of the unit is prevented if this fatal error condition is detected during the power-on sequence of the meter or register.

EP 0 099 110 A2

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ELECTRONIC POSTAGE METER HAVING A ONE TIME ACTUABLE OPERATING PROGRAM TO ENABLE SETTING OF CRITICAL ACCOUNTING REGISTERS TO PREDETERMINED VALUES

The present invention relates to electronic postage meters.

Electronic postage meters have been developed which include both a non-volatile memory which stores critical accounting information during non-use or power down conditions of the meter and a volatile random access memory. Meters of this type are described, for example, in the U.S. Patent No. 3,978,457 for MICROCOMPUTERIZED ELECTRONIC POSTAGE METER SYSTEM and also in U.S. Patent No. 4,301,507 for ELECTRONIC POSTAGE METER HAVING PLURAL COMPUTING SYSTEMS.

In meters of the above type, a firmware module, a read only memory, has a program which controls the operation of the postage meter. During operation of the meter, current operating information is written into a volatile random access memory. The information in the volatile random access memory is transferred to the non-volatile memory during a power down condition, as when the meter power switch is turned off. When the meter is turned on again during a power up condition, the image of the data in the non-volatile memory is copied or written into the volatile random access memory of the meter. As the meter is operated, the data in the volatile random access

memory is modified in accordance with the usage. The critical accounting information stored in non-volatile memory may include, by way of example, the amount of postage remaining in the meter for subsequent printing (a descending register) and the total amount of postage printed by the meter (an ascending register). Other types of accounting or operating data may also be stored in the non-volatile memory. Examples of such other data may include a piece count register and a control sum register (the sum of the ascending and descending registers). The non-volatile memory circuits have replaced the mechanical accounting registers or wheels utilized in previous mechanical meters, and enhanced their functions.

In manufacturing meters of this type, the non-volatile memory which will contain the critical accounting information and operating data is secured in a tamper resistant housing. This housing includes various security measures, such as teltales and break-off screws, to ensure that access to the non-voltile memory and other internal components cannot be achieved without leaving evidence of tampering. Accordingly, after the meter is assembled and when the meter is tested, if for any reason the register values are not proper or have values in them that are not desired, for example, due to testing, the only way that the non-volatile memory can be physically accessed is by taking the meter apart, which is a costly and time-consuming process. Moreover, in certain countries outside the United States the problem is compounded since it is the practice to turn meters over to the postal authorities for testing with the meter's registers set to a non-initial number. The

postal authorization test meters and run the registers from their non-initial number to a required (initial) reading before the meters are put in actual field service.

According to one aspect of the invention, there is provided a postage meter characterized by: a printing means for printing postage; a computing means coupled to said printing means for accounting for postage printed by said printing means; non-volatile memory means coupled to said computing means and including memory locations for storing critical meter accounting data; and a program store coupled to said computing means and containing a one-time actuable program operable to cause said computing means to write predetermined data into said memory locations for storing critical accounting data such that said critical accounting data is set to predetermined values, and said program store being operable to cause said computing means to prevent reentry into said program if said non-volatile memory locations have been previously set to said predetermined values.

According to another aspect of the invention, there is provided a postage meter characterized by: printing means for printing postage; a computing means coupled to said printing means for accounting for postage printed thereby; non-volatile memory means coupled to said computing means and having a register location adapted to store a meter serial number and a register location adapted to store a lock bit for preventing change of data in said serial number register location when said lock bit is set, said non-volatile memory further having register locations adapted to store data; a program store coupled to said computing means and containing a one-time actuatable program operable to cause said computing

means to preset said data registers in said non-volatile memory means only when said serial number is not set.

According to another aspect of the invention, there is provided a postage meter characterized by: printing means for printing postage; computing means coupled to said printing means for accounting for postage printed thereby; non-volatile memory means coupled to said computing means and having a register location to store a meter serial number and a register location adapted to store a lock bit for preventing change of data in said serial number register location when said lock bit is set, said non-volatile memory further having register locations adapted to store data; and a program store coupled to said computing means and containing a program operable to set said data registers to predetermined values, and further operable to prevent said computing means from presetting said data registers in said non-volatile memory when said serial number is set.

An embodiment of the invention will now be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings in which like reference numerals designate similar elements in the various views, and in which:

FIGURE 1 is a perspective view of an electronic postage meter adapted to utilize the present invention;

FIGURE 2 is a block diagram showing one arrangement of the internal major components of an electronic postage meter according to the present invention;

FIGURES 3a-d are partial memory maps of the non-volatile memory shown in FIGURE 2 depicting a bit lock indicator and serial number locations as well as

locations and organizations of critical accounting registers controlled by a one-time usable register preset routine used to preset these registers to predetermined values;

FIGURE 4 is a diagrammatic representation of a serial number message including an operational indicator BCD bit digit; and

FIGURES 5a and 5b when taken together in the manner shown in FIGURE 5 are a flow chart of the firmware program of the read only memory shown in FIGURE 2 which enables preset of critical accounting registers upon entry of a serial number lock message and including protection against inadvertent entry into the register preset routine.

Reference is now made to Figure 1, which is a perspective view of a postage meter according to the present invention. An electronic postage meter 2 is removably secured to a postage meter base 4. In this arrangement, a slot 6 is provided between the postage meter 2 and the base 4 at the forward edge thereof, for receiving envelopes or the like for the printing of postage thereon. The postage meter is provided with a display panel 8, preferably an electronic display device, as well as a control panel or keyboard 10.

The meter 2 includes a service mode switch 12. Power is applied to the meter 2 via an AC power line cord 14 when the meter power switch 15 is turned on. The meter also includes a communications port 16 which is connected by a communications cable 18 to an external message generator 20. The message generator 20 is removable from the meter by detaching the cable 18 from the communications port 16. Communications between the meter 2 and the

external message generator 20 may be in accordance with the serial communication echoplex technique described in U.S. Patent No. 4,301,507 for ELECTRONIC POSTAGE METER HAVING PLURAL COMPUTING SYSTEMS.

As will be explained in greater detail hereinafter, the operation of the keyboard 10 of the electronic postage meter 2 differs from that of the keyboard 22 of the external message generator 20. The external message generator keyboard 22, with its unique keys 24, can invoke a routine in a read only memory in the external message generator 20 to generate a message with a unique header and format suitable to invoke a particular function in the electronic postage meter 2. That is, the keyboard 24 of the external message generator 20 can cause a message to be generated by the external message generator and communicated over communications channel 18 to the meter to invoke a routine stored in a read only memory (ROM) of the electronic meter 2 which cannot be invoked by actuation of the meter keyboard 10. The routine is used to preset critical accounting and other data adapted to be stored in non-volatile memory 36, as hereinafter explained in greater detail. The non-volatile memory 36 is secured within a housing 28 of the meter 2. Housing 28 is of the type which protects the meter electronics, including non-volatile memory 26, against the effect of electromagnetic radiation. The housing 28 is also tamper-resistant and designed using teltales and the like to leave evidence of attempt to gain access to the interior of the meter housing.

Reference is now made to FIGURE 2 which is a block diagram showing one arrangement of the major internal components of an electronic meter embodying the present

invention. The electronic postage meter 2 is controlled by a microprocessor 30 operated under control of a series of programs stored in a program stored in the form of a read only memory 32. Connected to the microprocessor are the keyboard 10 and display 8 as well as a postage printing mechanism 34. The microprocessor accepts information entered via the keyboard or via the communications port 16 from an external message generator, such as information entered from the external message generator 20 over the communications channel 18. Critical accounting and other information is stored in a non-volatile memory 36. The non-volatile memory 36 may be an MNOS semiconductor type memory, a battery augmented CMOS memory, or other suitable non-volatile memory component. The function of the non-volatile memory 36 is to store critical postage meter data from Random Access Memory 40 during those times when the power is not applied to the meter. This data may include, in addition to the serial number of the meter, information as to the amount of the descending register (the amount of postage available for printing), the value of the ascending register (the total amount of postage printed by the meter), and the value of the piece count register (the total number of cycles the meter has performed), as well as other types of data, such as service information, which are desired to be retained in the memory when no power is applied to the meter.

When the meter power switch 15 is turned on causing a power supply 38 internal to the meter to energize the microprocessor 30 and the postage printing mechanism 34, the information stored in the non-volatile memory 36 is transferred via the microprocessor 30 to the volatile

random access memory 40. The volatile, random access memory 40 after power up contains an image or copy of the information stored in the non-volatile memory 36 prior to energization. During operation of the postage meter, the data in the volatile, random access memory 40 is modified. Accordingly, when postage is printed, the descending register will be decremented, ascending register incremented and the piece counter register incremented. When the power switch 15 is turned off, the modified image, the current updated data in the volatile, random access memory 40 is transferred via the microprocessor 30 back into the non-volatile memory 36. The data is transferred into a suitably prepared area of the non-volatile memory. Thus, the non-volatile memory is updated during the power down cycle when the power switch 15 is turned off. A like transfer of information between the non-volatile memory and the volatile, random access memory also occurs when the service mode switch 12 is actuated.

It should be noted that the external message generator 20 contains keys for generating special messages for transmittal to the meter via a serial echoplex communications channel 18 to the microprocessor 30. The external message generator 20 includes unique keys 24 not found in the postage meter keyboard to enable the generation of a particular unique header message which can not be generated by the meter keyboard itself. Among these are keys, which also may include a service lock switch 25, provided to send, enter and exit serial number mode messages. Also included are keys to send a special 'enter serial number' message. When desired, after the meter has entered the service mode, the external message generator 20 will send an 'enter serial

number lock' message as described in U.S. patent application, Serial No. 355,437, filed March 8, 1982 for IMPROVED NON-VOLATILE MEMORY SERIAL NUMBER LOCK FOR ELECTRONIC POSTAGE METER of John H. Soderberg and Edward C. Duwel, and assigned to Pitney Bowes Inc. This serial number lock message is designed to trigger the meter to operate under control of a special one-time usable firmware program to preset the accounting and other registers. A unique feature of the external message generator is that the keys to generate the messages provide unique headers and construct unique messages that cannot be generated in the meter 2 itself by actuation of the meter keyboard. Therefore, the messages to invoke the preset register routine stored in the meter firmware module are unique to the external message generator and cannot be duplicated in the meter keyboard or its switches. The external message generator 20, thus, has a unique program to generate the predetermined header, format and data which the meter is programmed to utilize. However, the meter 2 itself does not contain a program to allow generation of the same header, format and data by manipulation of the meter keyboard.

Reference is now made to FIGURE 3a. Contained in the non-volatile memory 36 of the meter are seven nibbles 42 which are reserved for the serial number. Also contained in non-volatile memory 36 is an additional bit position 44 which is reserved for the lock indicator. The placement of the serial number is shown by the indicators of the binary coded digit, where BCD 7 is the most significant digit of the serial number and BCD 1 is the least significant digit.

When the service mode of the meter is entered via an external message, the firmware logic of the meter causes the non-volatile memory 36 to be prepared to have new or modified service data written into the non-volatile memory. The service field contains the serial number location. It should be recognized that when the present invention is utilized with electronic postage meters of the type shown in U.S. Patent No. 4,301,507 for ELECTRONIC POSTAGE METER HAVING PLURAL COMPUTING SYSTEMS, the service mode switch described therein, as well as in U.S. Patent No. 4,280,180 for ELECTRONIC POSTAGE METER HAVING FIELD SETTABLE CONTROL VALUES, is left in the operational mode as opposed to the service mode. This causes the external communications channel to remain operative. The entry into the service routine is achieved by the transmission of a service routine message from the external message generator 20.

It should be recognized that for the purposes of the description of present invention, the meter is of the type wherein the information from non-volatile memory 36 is read during power up of the meter (when the meter power switch 15 is turned ON) and transferred back to non-volatile memory during the change from the operational to the service mode of the meter (when the meter service switch is moved from the operational to the service position). At all other times, a current copy of image of this information is in the volatile, random access memory 40 of the meter. Changes are made to the image of the information in the volatile random access memory 40. During the power down of the meter (when the meter power switch 15 is turned OFF) or mode change (service to operate or operate to service), the

information in the volatile random access memory 40 is written into the non-volatile memory 36.

FIGURE 3b depicts the memory map 46 of the portion of the non-volatile memory dedicated to the descending register information. The descending register is a resettable register which is adapted to store the amount of postage available for printing by the meter. As the postage is printed, the descending register image in the volatile, random access memory is decreased in accordance with the amount of printed postage. Upon power down of the meter, this information is written into the descending register location of the non-volatile memory 36 as new information replacing the previous information stored in that location. The value stored in the descending register may be increased with representations of added funds when the meter is recharged i.e., when additional postage value available for printing is entered into the meter.

Reference is now made to FIGURE 3c which shows a memory map 48 of the non-volatile memory portion dedicated to storing information concerning ascending register amounts. The ascending register records the total amount of postage printed by the meter and is continually incremented throughout the life of the meter. This register is non-resettable.

Reference is now made to FIGURE 3d which shows a non-volatile memory map 50 of the piece count register. The piece count register is a register which is non-resettable and maintains a count of the number of cycles of the meter. This register works in a similar manner to that described above in connection with the descending register.

The ascending, descending and piece count registers are the three registers which are set to the predetermined value upon the receipt of the serial number lock message from the external message generator.

Reference is now made to FIGURE 4. The enter serial number message consists of a one byte (eight bits) header or identifier 52, a format byte 54 and four data bytes 56 for a total of six bytes. Contained in the four data bytes 56 are a BCD operational indicator and seven binary coded digits, two per byte, representing the serial number. Header 52, format 54 and data bytes 56 are as generally described in the aforementioned U.S. Patent No. 4,301,507. The header 52 provides identification of the unique message that is to follow, here the fact that the message constitutes the serial number. The format byte 54 contains two BCD digits indicating the number of data digits to follow and the placement of the decimal point within these digits. In the present case of the serial number, there is no decimal point; therefore the decimal point position indicator will be shown as containing four ones (hex F) in decimal point indicator position.

The operational indicator BCD digit 58 indicates to the meter operating under the control of the firmware program contained in the read only memory 32 which operation, (change the serial number or lock the serial number) is to be performed. A zero will indicate a desire to change the serial number and a one will indicate a desire to lock the serial number. Codes 2 HEX to F HEX of the operational indicator are undefined and will cause the meter to return a procedural error message.

Reference is now made to FIGURES 5, 5a and 5b. A message received from the external device enters the serial number into the meter. The serial number message is first checked for the correct number of digits in the message. If eight digits are not present in the serial number field, a procedural error message is generated which causes a status message to be returned to the external message generator. If the format is correct, the non-volatile memory serial number lock-bit position is then checked. If the bit is set, a procedural error message is generated. If the bit is not set, the operational indicator bit in the message is then checked to determine whether it is set to a zero or a one. If the bit is set to a zero, the serial number in the volatile, random access memory image is changed. However, if the operational indicator bit is set to a one, the operational indicator bit is again checked to ensure that the value was correctly read and is in fact a one. If the value is one, the program proceeds. However, if upon this check it is determined that the value is not one, a procedural error message is generated and a status message is returned to the external message generator.

If the operational indicator bit is set to one, a comparison is made between the new serial number data and the old serial number data. If the data is not the same, a procedural error message is generated and a status message is returned to the external message generator. However, if the comparison indicates that the two serial numbers are identical, the lock indicator bit is tested to determine whether it has been set. If the bit has been set, a fatal error message is generated. This fatal error is non-recoverable and the meter is caused to lock

up. The meter remains inoperative and must be taken out of service and returned for repair or service. Once the fatal error message is generated and the meter locked up, a user cannot render the machine operative. It should be noted that electronic postage meter procedural errors which can be overcome by reinitialization of the meter or fatal errors which will cause the meter to become inoperative and lock up are described in pending U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 225,571, filed January 16, 1981, for ELECTRONIC POSTAL METER SYSTEM and assiged to Pitney Bowes Inc. and in U.S. Patent No. 4,251,874 for ELECTRONIC POSTAL METER SYSTEM.

If however, the lock indicator bit has not been set, then a predetermined value programmed into the meter's read only memory 32 is used to preset the descending register. This value may be zero or some other determined value which is programmed into the read only memory. After this operation is completed, the serial number lock bit is then again tested to determine whether or not it has been set. If the lock bit has been determined as being set, a fatal error is generated. But, if the bit has not been set as determined by this test, a predetermined value programmed into the meter's read only memory is used to preset the piece counter. Again, similar to the descending register, the value can be zero or any predetermined value programmed into the read only memory. In a similar manner, the serial number lock bit is checked prior to sending a preset value to the ascending register. As the last operation, the serial number lock bit is again checked. If the bit is set, as before, a fatal error message is generated, but if the lock bit has not been set, the lock bit is then set and the serial number is locked into place and

additionally, re-entry into the preset register program is precluded.

It should be noted that before setting the value of any of the critical registers to the preset amount, the serial number lock bit is tested to determine that it has not been set. Thus, should the program be entered due to a noise pulse or other reason, the meter would be caused to generate a fatal error message, causing the meter to lock up and requiring it to be removed from service for repair.

Thus, summarizing the invention, unlimited testing of the non-volatile memory and meter is allowed with a routine being incorporated in the meter, which is a one-time usable routine, to preset the critical accounting registers to a predetermined condition, such as zero or even a negative or positive reading, as the last phase of the manufacturing operation. The one-time usable routine may also function so that the routine sets the registers to a negative or positive number for those countries where it is desired. The postal authorities or the manufacturing facility can actuate the one-time usable routine to zero the meter's registers after testing in the event the testing runs the registers above/or below a zero value. Since an operating program is included in the meter which will allow the accounting registers of the meter to be preset to a predetermined condition contained in the firmware read only memory module of the meter, it is critical that provision must be made to ensure that the register preset routine is not inadvertently or intentionally entered once the meter is put into service. Otherwise, the user may lose monetary information stored in the meter.

In accordance with the invention, a repetitive self--checking mechanism is provided to determine whether or not the register preset routine has been previously actuated to prevent the meter from completing a register preset operation to change the critical data in the accounting registers even if the routine is entered after the meter is put into service. If the routine is entered inadvertently, for example, because of a noise pulse or component failure which causes an improper microprocessor jump to a location in the firmware module which contains this program, the meter will be caused to be put into a fatal error condition. This disables the meter from further operation and a special code is written from a register in the volatile random access memory provided for receiving such diagnostic information into a corresponding register in a non-volatile memory upon power down of the meter.

Claims:

1. A postage meter characterized by:

printing means (34) for printing postage;

a computing means (30) coupled to said printing means (34) for accounting for postage printed by said printing means;

non-volatile memory means (36) coupled to said computing means (30) and including memory locations (46, 48, 50) for storing critical meter accounting data; and

a program store (32) coupled to said computing means and containing a one-time actuable program operable to cause said computing means (30) to write predetermined data into said memory locations (46, 48, 50) for storing critical accounting data such that said critical accounting data is set to predetermined values, and said program store being operable to cause said computing means (30) to prevent reentry into said program if said non-volatile memory locations have been previously set to said predetermined values.

2. A postage meter as claimed in claim 1 characterized in that said program store contains a further program arranged to cause the computing means to generate a fatal error message which will lock the postage meter against operation if said program for setting said non-volatile memory locations to predetermined values is entered and said memory locations have been previously set to said predetermined values.

3. A postage meter characterized by:

printing means (34) for printing postage;

a computing means (30) coupled to said printing means (34) for accounting for postage printed thereby;

non-volatile memory means (36) coupled to said computing means (30) and having a register location (42) adapted to store a meter serial number and a register location (44) adapted to store a lock bit for preventing change of data in said serial number register location (42) when said lock bit is set, said non-volatile memory further having register locations (46, 48, 50) adapted to store data;

a program store (32) coupled to said computing means (30) and containing a one-time actuable program operable to cause said computing means (30) to preset said data registers (46, 48, 50) in said non-volatile memory means (36) only when said serial number is not set.

4. A postage meter characterized by:

printing means (34) for printing postage;

a computing means (30) coupled to said printing means (34) for accounting for postage printed thereby;

non-volatile memory means (36) coupled to said computing means (30) and having a register location (42) to store a meter serial number and a register location (44) adapted to store a lock bit for preventing change of data in said serial number register location when said lock bit is set, said non-voaltile memory further having register locations (46, 48, 50) adapted to store data; and

a program store (32) coupled to said computing means and containing a program operable to set said data registers to predetermined values, and further operable to prevent said computing means (30) from presetting said data registers in said non-volatile memory when said serial number is set.

5. A postage meter as claimed in claim 3 or 4 characterized in that said program store contains a further program which will cause the postage meter to generate a fatal error message which will lock the postage meter against operation if an attempt is made to preset registers in said meter and the serial number lock has been previously set.

6. A postage meter as claimed in any one of claims 3 to 5 characterized in that said data registers include a descending register (46) for storing data representing postage available for printing.

7. A postage meter as claimed in any one of claim 3 to 6 characterized in that said data registers include an ascending register (48) for storing data representing the total postage printed by said meter.

8. A postage meter as claimed in any one of claims 3 to 7 characterized in that data registers include a piece count register (50) for storing data representing the number of meter operating cycles.

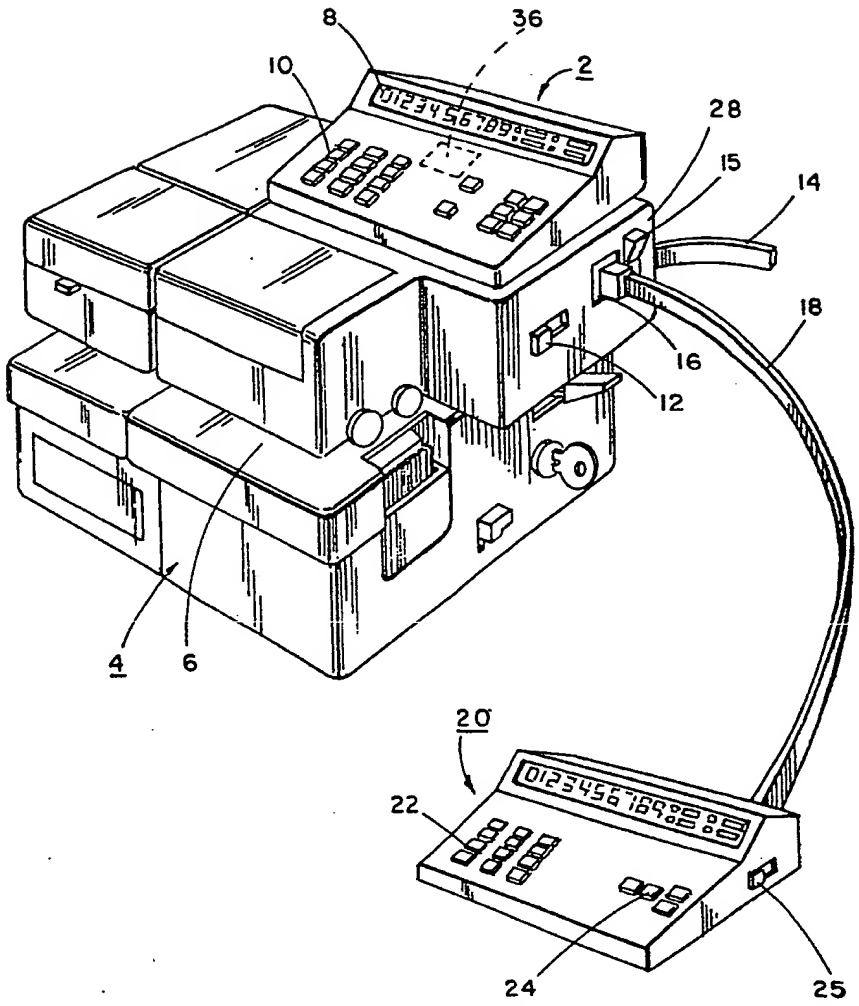

FIG. 1

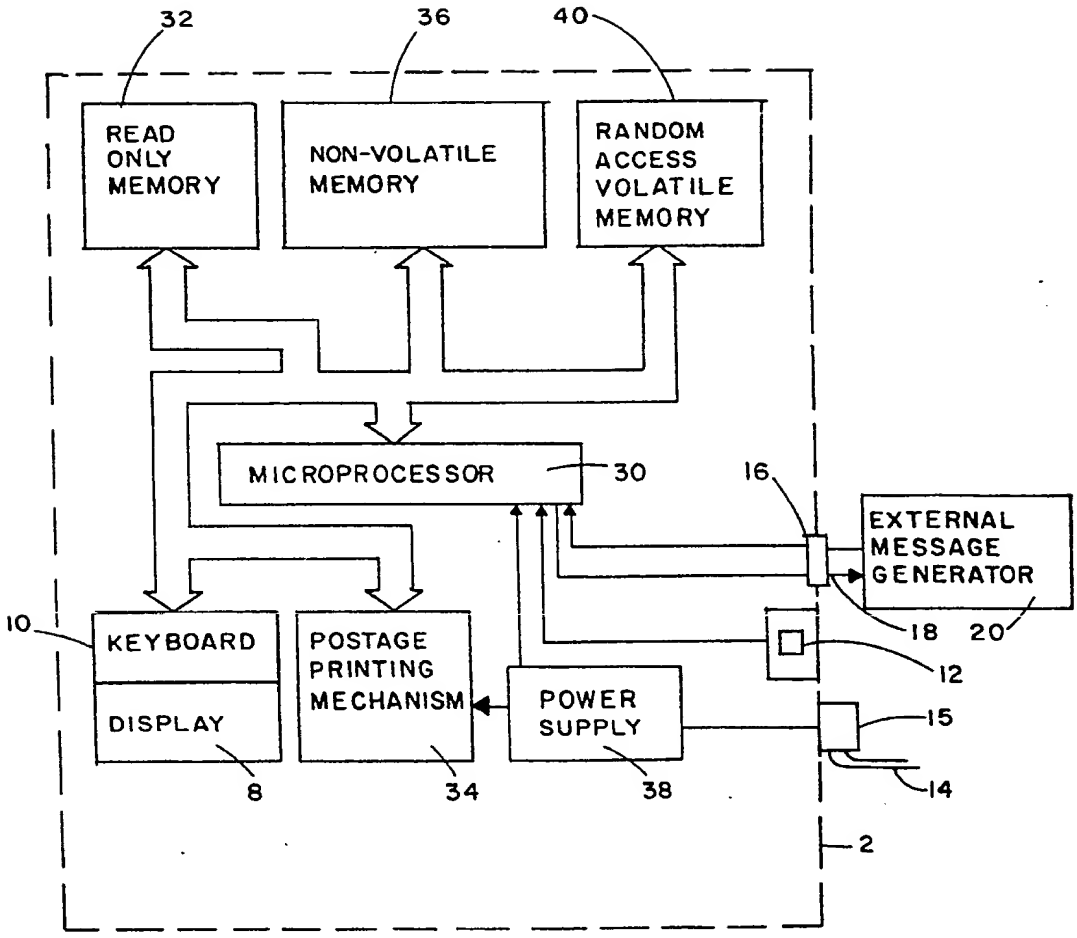
32
36
40
READ ONLY MEMORY
NON-VOLATILE MEMORY
RANDOM ACCESS VOLATILE MEMORY
MICROPROCESSOR
30
16
EXTERNAL MESSAGE GENERATOR
18
20
10
KEYBOARD
DISPLAY
POSTAGE PRINTING MECHANISM
POWER SUPPLY
12
15
14
8
34
38
2

FIG. 2

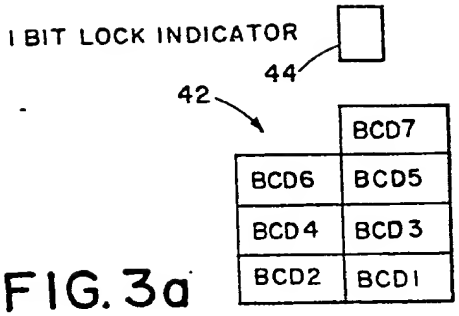

FIG. 3a

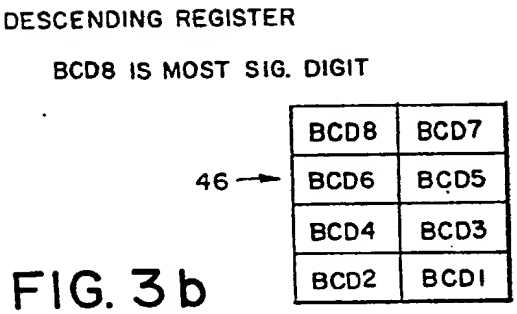

FIG. 3b

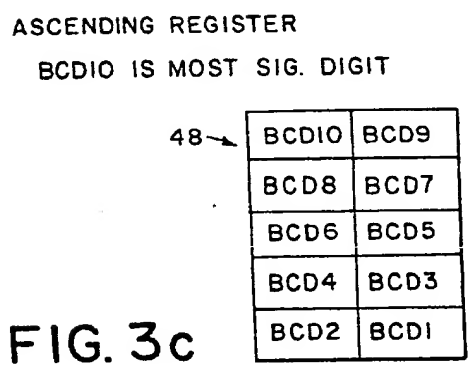

FIG. 3c

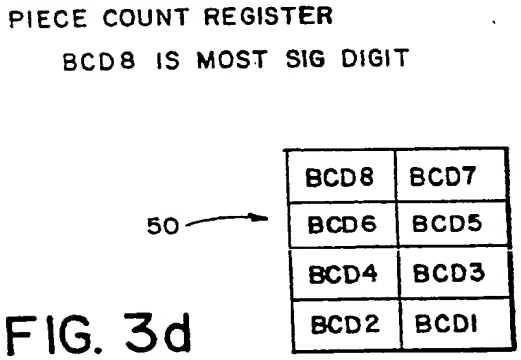

FIG. 3d

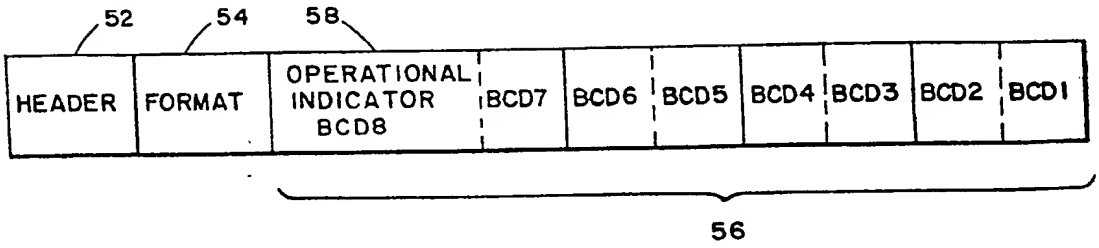

FIG. 4

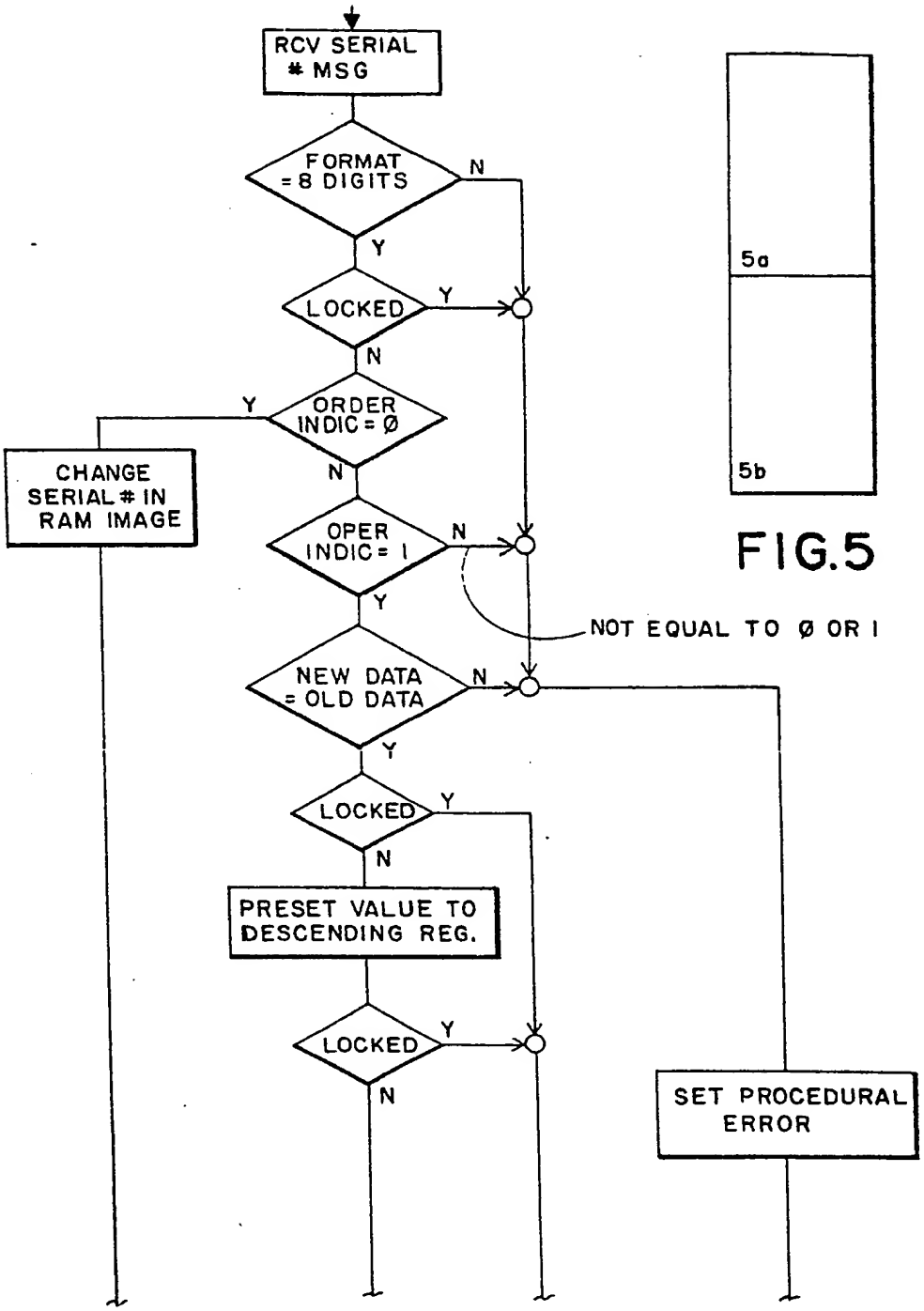
RCV SERIAL # MSG
FORMAT = 8 DIGITS
N
Y
LOCKED
Y
N
ORDER INDIC = Ø
Y
N
CHANGE SERIAL # IN RAM IMAGE
OPER INDIC = 1
N
Y
NOT EQUAL TO Ø OR 1
NEW DATA = OLD DATA
N
Y
LOCKED
Y
N
PRESET VALUE TO DESCENDING REG.
LOCKED
Y
N
SET PROCEDURAL ERROR

FIG.5a

5a
5b

FIG.5

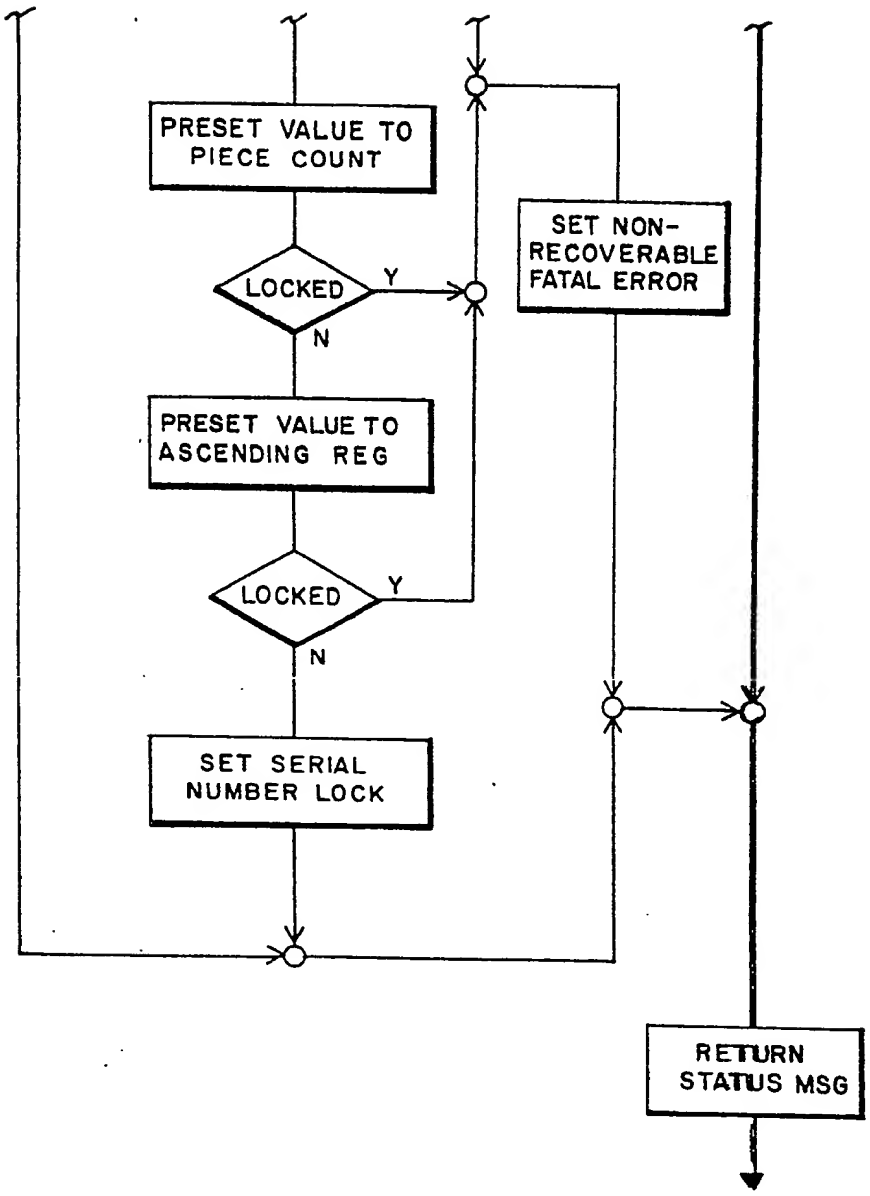
PRESET VALUE TO PIECE COUNT
LOCKED
Y
N
SET NON-RECOVERABLE FATAL ERROR
PRESET VALUE TO ASCENDING REG
LOCKED
Y
N
SET SERIAL NUMBER LOCK
RETURN STATUS MSG

FIG. 5b